

New Narratology, New Story

Nouvelle narratologie, nouveau récit

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This English translation has not been published in printed form/Cette traduction anglaise n'a pas été publiée sous forme imprimée.

- 1 In his article, Raphaël Baroni (2016) has made a thoroughly honest diagnosis of the present state of narratology. It provides a set of responses to a situation that is all the more worrying because the proliferation of works claiming to be narratological threatens to conceal just how serious the situation really is. Basically, what he is saying is that the current success of narratological studies is built on two errors that could rapidly compromise or even exhaust the discipline. The more narratologists come along, whether they are beginners or veterans, the less narratology is actually practised, in the strict sense of the term. The two errors pointed out by Raphaël Baroni are in fact directly linked, and could be reworded as follows. First, the very subject of the discipline has changed: instead of narrative as a theoretical subject worthy of the name, sometimes enhanced by a capital letter, anecdotal narratives are now preferred, such as the myriad stories that are born, develop and disappear in almost every circumstance of the lives of men and women. To be more precise: the subject of narratology is less the narrative *in itself* than the narrative *in action*. Second, it is also the horizon or *raison d'être* of narratological studies that is changing. Instead of trying to understand what a narrative is, even if it means asking ourselves how the narrative is used in this or that context, narratological theory is only considered to be a toolbox, often appallingly poor and naive, that can be used in an increasingly diverse range of fields. While the new sophistry churns out ancient thought in the form of micro-manuals for personal development – *Seneca for Managers*, as it were – the new narratology flies to the assistance of the lifelong-learning sector to offer its services to the “Philistines” and “Notaries” decried by Georges Brassens when he set to music the

poem of 1881 by Jean Richepin (1957, listen to “*Les Philistins*” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCYIWB8DLT0>).

- 2 It is not for me to comment on the solutions advocated by Raphael Baroni (after all, I am not primarily a narratologist myself). I see them as a healthy and wise mixture of the pessimism that goes with intelligence and a determined optimism, which I hope the community will take into account both in France and abroad. But perhaps I can bring to the reader's attention a few other elements of the great debate from a perspective that today seems to be the least respected qualified of all, namely literature. As Daniel Rondeau, the long-term collaborator of Gérard Voitey, a notary (!) and patron of the *Quai Voltaire* publishing house and also a literary suicide, used to enjoy saying: "If we're going to go under, we might as well go under with something we truly love" (Bessard-Banquy, 2012: 334). This quotation, if I may digress for a moment, is already a problem for any apprentice narratologist. Who is talking here? Daniel Rondeau, interviewed by Olivier Bessard-Banquy? Daniel Rondeau quoting Gerard Voitey? Olivier Bessard-Banquy putting words into the mouth of Daniel Rondeau that he may merely have been thinking? I, myself? All these people (all these characters?) at the same time? Some more than others? The nested narrative can be quite a tangle!
- 3 In Raphaël Baroni's historical overview, much importance is attached to the historical transformations of narratology, for example the considerable broadening of its foundation. The narrative ceases to consist only of literary narrative (written, published, read, rewritten, etc.). It gradually emancipates itself from this initial corpus – a *sine qua non* for its almost universal success. Nowadays, narrative is infiltrating even the seemingly least narrative forms of communication, such as “storytelling”, which is merely a marketing technique, or, even more radically, “signification”, as is now customary in the newspeak of art historians, where the “meaning” of a work is regularly given as a synonym for “narrative”. Here, two remarks come to mind, and their convergence is not only due to historical reasons, as I shall try to show in the following sections.

Narratology and the adversaries of narrative

- 4 Here is the first major comment. Inseparable from the rise of structuralism around 1960, the emergence of narratology was not a homogeneous process. At a time when everyone was beginning to get to grips with the concept of narrative, with its well-known positive effects, there was also a strong resistance to narrative, on the part of both writers on the one hand and of critics and theorists – who were also often writers – on the other, who were trying to *theorize* narrative. This refusal was based on solid literary references. They range from Stéphane Mallarmé, in his famous *Observation relative au poème* of 1879 (Observation relative to the poem), which later became the preface to *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice):

“The literary value, if I am allowed to say so, of this print-less distance which mentally separates groups of words or words themselves, is to periodically accelerate or slow the movement, the scansion, the sequence even, given one's simultaneous sight of the page: the latter taken as unity, as elsewhere for the Verse or the perfect line. Imagination flowers and vanishes, swiftly, following the flow of the writing, round the fragmentary stations of a capital phrase introduced by and extended from the title. Everything takes place, in sections, by supposition;

narrative is avoided" (Mallarmé, 1879. Translation by A. S. Kline, 2004: p.79; my italics).

- 5 ... to Paul Valéry, who shifted the debate from poetry to the novel, with his no less famous April Fool's joke at the expense of novelists: "La marquise sortit à cinq heures" (a phrase attributed to Paul Valéry by André Breton in his first *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924; for a detailed discussion of Paul Valéry's ideas on the novel, see Ricardou, 1971: 76-88). The categorical opposition to narrative is understandable in the context of poetry, where many writers were eager to put an end to the narrative poetry of the long eighteenth century. Modernity moved radically from the register of the *epic*, which survives in some of Victor Hugo's collections, to the short form, the discovery of the lyric "I" being inseparable from the rediscovery of the sonnet, a poem to be grasped at a glance, then to post-*Coup de dés* visual poetry and what has been called, not without hyperbole, the movement of "pure poetry", which compensates for typographical excess by a return to the classical marriage of sound and meaning (Baetens, De Geest, 2013). But what should we think of such an opposition at the heart of what has long been the main stronghold of narration, namely the novel? There are two main answers to be put forward here.
- 6 First, distrust of narrative is the result of the disruption of traditional hierarchies. Little by little, the novel took the place that poetry occupied at the center of the art of writing: first the novel overtook poetry in sales figures, then it drove it from its central place in the literary system. Until the 1920s, the great literary debates still revolved around poetry. But the supreme moment of pure poetry, in the middle of the decade, was also its swan song. Poetry was relegated to the margins of literature, but the novel has not automatically taken its place. The latter inherits many of the questions that were being applied to poetry at the time of the handover, hence "the poetic destiny", so to speak, of the novel. Without spelling it out, this is indeed the basic trend analyzed by Roland Barthes in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Writing Degree Zero – 1953). The decline of poetry, which at the end of the nineteenth century turned towards a metaphysics of the Word (disregarding syntax), prevented it from being anything other than a purely individual "style"; the search for a new "writing", capable of taking a stand in relation to the social state of the language at a given moment in its history, seems to be reserved henceforth for the novel, as shown in all the examples given by Roland Barthes, who was then very close to the partisans of "*écriture blanche*", signifying "minimalist" or "neutral" or "colorless" writing (it is generally considered, incidentally, that the period 1950-1970 was not a great period for French poetry). Some twenty years earlier, the great American critic Edmund Wilson, known in France primarily through his correspondence with Vladimir Nabokov (Nabokov, Wilson, 1979), had already formulated a similar and perhaps even more radical thesis. According to him, the shift in the literary center of gravity from poetry to the novel is not only due to a "drift" of modern poetry, locked in narrowly formalist or narcissistic preoccupations, but also to the inability of this now ancient form of discourse to adapt to the demands of modern life¹. In *Axel's Castle*, a remarkable 1931 study of modern literature of the post-symbolist period (we would have to say "modern literature" today, because the authors analyzed are William Butler Yeats, Paul Valéry, Marcel Proust, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein), this hypothesis is the central theme of a study which aimed to identify the fundamental trends of both French and English literature (T. S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein being American expatriates in Europe). For example:

"I have suggested, in connection with Valéry and Eliot, that verse itself as a literary medium is coming to be used for fewer and fewer and for more and more special purposes, and that it may be destined to fall into disuse. And it seems to me that Joyce's literary development is a striking corroboration of this view. His prose works have an artistic intensity, a definitive beauty of surface and of form, which makes him comparable to the great poets rather than to most of the great novelists" (Wilson, 1931: 221).

- 7 The mutation of the discourse concerning the novel does not mean a movement towards the novel in verse or the poet's novel, neither of which threatens the canonical definition of the novel. It leads to a much more fundamental alignment of the novel with poetry, understood as a constrained discourse, hostile to any uncertainty, and the chief victim of this new alliance is the narrative, symbol *par excellence* of all that is considered vapid, gratuitous, and shapeless. In the experimental novel that emerged in the wake of the avant-garde, paradoxically perhaps, narrative is avoided at all cost – in the eyes of many theorists, at least, the authors themselves often taking a stance with more subtle distinctions. Once the initial shocks had been assimilated, it became easier to recognize the extent to which modern or experimental novelists aim less at rejecting narrative once and for all than at diverting the narrative towards new forms and original functions, including, for example, a critical view of the narrative.
- 8 Secondly, interest in the novel in which the story no longer occupies the foreground is a phenomenon that is not limited to literature alone. Structuralism is not a strictly literary or linguistic phenomenon, far from it, and is an essential context for the development of a true theory of narrative. As an inter- and trans-disciplinary movement, it brings together perspectives from many fields, including psychoanalysis and semiotics. Regarding the latter, which is probably the real cement of the whole structuralist edifice, it is important to note the ambivalence of its contribution to narratology. Following the work of Greimas, clumsily reduced in many narratological manuals to the actantial model alone, the narrative is only one of the three forms that the life of meaning and therefore of culture can take². Since meaning is by definition an open practice, every culture is led to question its deepest structures by bringing into play one or more of the following mechanisms: metaphor, argumentation, and narrative (Klinkenberg, 1996). Each of these three instruments, so to speak, is capable of displacing the essential oppositions that characterize a social system (man vs woman, nature vs culture, work vs rest, freedom vs constraint, human vs animal, organic vs mechanical, and so on). This is to say from the outset that narrative does not call all the shots. Other techniques for achieving meaning compete with it, or even replace it. Though narration may be universal, it does not hold an inherently privileged position. The crisis of the novel that occurred in the era of modernism – in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the term, i.e. the "high modernism" of the period 1910-1940 – is, if not proof of it, at least one of the symptoms. The work of Joseph Frank (1945), who was the first to analyze the erosion of the temporal dimension of the novel in favor of its spatial and material – one almost feels like saying "poetic" – dimension, remains the best known example.
- 9 The second major point that should be made here concerns reticence about the narrative, which seems to be part of the *Zeitgeist* of the post-war period. This is illustrated, for example, by the extreme formalism of Clement Greenberg (1961), who opposes the aspiration to conquer the essence of a medium (painting and sculpture in his work as an art critic), with its complete opposite, which he sometimes

contemptuously calls “narrative” or “literature” (the theoretical writings of Jean Ricardou, a few years later, bear many similarities with this idea of media “specificity”). No less significant is a work such as *Économie et symbolique* by Jean-Joseph Goux (1973), close to the radical materialism of the avant-garde literary magazine *Tel Quel*. Starting from a Marxist reading of ideology and the necessary reversal of the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, Jean-Joseph Goux proposed an all-encompassing critique of all systems of representation – money, of course, being a particular example – where an ideological obfuscation of the infrastructure (the material relationships that determine the story) by the superstructure (the effects of meaning that are designed to cast a veil over the underlying material base) occurs. The effects of such censorship can be seen even in language and the various forms of artistic expression: the signified represses the signifier; the melody, the sound of the music; the narrative, the work on form, and so on. On a purely literary level, the clearest – but also the most brilliant – articulation of this ideological criticism can be found in the works of Jean Ricardou, especially *Pour une théorie du nouveau roman* (1971) (Towards a theory of the *nouveau roman*).

- 10 The suspicious view of the novel, as something to be “avoided” henceforth in any conception of writing that might aspire to surpass the bourgeois writing of the nineteenth century, was accompanied by a real craze for narrative and especially anti-narrative experiences that dominated the production of “serious” novels around 1960. Now, it seems quite reasonable to believe that there is a causal link between the gradual public acceptance of less conventional forms of narrative – in the French context, this of course means the *Nouveau Roman*, and then the *Nouveau Nouveau Roman* (Ricardou, 1990) – and the emergence of narratology as a key discipline, first in language studies, and then in the humanities in general. The invitation to cross the frontier between traditional and experimental literature, with the novel increasingly venturing into the avant-garde terrain hitherto reserved for the inventors of new poetic languages, stimulates a desire for reflection and understanding that narratology almost naturally steps in to fulfil. *Figures III* (Genette, 1972) provided a version that was both hyper-detailed and acceptable, with some help from Marcel Proust, for all literary and ideological sensibilities.
- 11 But although this continuity is strong, it is not absolute. Indeed, while the success of less accepted narrative forms explains the rise of the new narratological knowledge that allows for a better understanding of what kind of revolution was occurring with respect to the novel, the decline in interest in less conventional writing was rapidly followed by a decline in interest for this same narratological knowledge. In the absence of any great enthusiasm for the new objects of narratology, i.e., the texts of authors such as Alain Robbe-Grillet or Claude Simon, no doubt the most radical authors of the neo-romantic movement, and also in the absence of curiosity for works that, after a certain time, arouse more irritation and indifference than genuine interest, the need to invest more in this discipline, centered on the very essence of the novelistic narrative, was bound to diminish. It is not possible, of course, to limit the narrative to the field of novels alone, but it is clear that it was the excitement surrounding the novelistic innovations of the 1950s and 1960s that facilitated the acceptance of the arduous and sometimes somewhat arid research program that is characteristic of Greimasian-inspired structuralist narratology. The rapid erosion, in the 1970s, of the avant-garde novel, then its complete eradication from the 1980s (no need to recall here the distasteful example of Philippe Sollers’s 1983 novel *Femmes*, the historical watershed

between avant-garde and rearguard in contemporary French novels), are not negligible factors in the nascent crisis of narratology, a discipline that is omnipresent but now cut off from any real debate on creation.

Can we write just anything?

- 12 From this perspective, it is perhaps finally time for narratologists to examine their own conscience. What is behind the obsession to keep coming back to the same examples, surprisingly few in number, and all very dated without exception, that constitute the main part of the corpus analyzed year after year? What is the point of returning for the umpteenth time to Jane Austen's indirect free style, the focalization in Gustave Flaubert's texts, or Marcel Proust's anisochronies? Why is there so much complacency about things that are so far removed from what is really wrong with the novel – because no-one can seriously believe that the unfathomable subtleties of Jane Austen, Gustave Flaubert or Marcel Proust ever prevented readers from reading and loving their works? The same is not true of the great experimental texts by writers such as Claude Simon or Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose persistent harshness has been somewhat forgotten in favor of the autobiographical or autofictional books of these two authors' later years. Such a reading should not be confused with a simple return to the past as it could easily be combined with more current research on adaptation, rewriting and transcultural circulation: when will there be an analysis of Peter Handke's reworking of Robbe-Grillet's *Voyeur* (1955) in *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick: A Novel* (1970), followed by the Wim Wenders film version (*Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 1972), while waiting for the film itself to be turned back into either verse or prose?
- 13 Narratologists have their work cut out if they hope to fill the gap left by the disappearance of the experimental novel with some hastily chosen new subjects for analysis. Even though non-literary narratologies are gradually managing to shake off the domination of linguistic models, their basic definition of narrative is still somewhat cautious. Neither the narrative in the cinema, nor the narrative in television series, nor the narrative of medical therapy, nor the narrative in a scriptwriting regime, nor the narrative that can be freely adapted in this or that medium, nor the transmedial narrative of what is known as “convergence culture”, seriously call into question the narratological edifice as it has existed since the 1960s. Whatever the methodological orientation chosen – post-classical, cognitive, feminist, unnatural, etc. – the focus of the project will be the same, and the corpuses that we work on are no longer capable of arousing much theoretical excitement regarding narrative as an object of study. The theoretical reflection on video games (Aarseth, 2007) is an exception to this rule, but seems to lead to a kind of admission of narratological failure: if video games can no longer be analyzed using narratological tools – and the same goes for other key concepts such as “fiction” or “subject”, which are also undermined by this new cultural practice – we have to draw the conclusion that rather than rethinking narratology we should be attempting other approaches (the debate around *ludology* [Aarseth, 2001] can be interpreted as the recent symptom of such an attempt at emancipation). It is not out of the question that narratology could suffer the same fate as cultural studies. Having once embraced everything and (almost) anything, this discipline is now shrinking in scope, overtaken by its former sub-disciplines with names like “postcolonial studies”, “gender studies”, “queer studies”, “performance studies”, and so on. Similarly, it

cannot be ruled out that narratology, as a quasi-universal discipline, will soon give way to a whole range of new disciplines that are gradually detaching themselves from the mother discipline. The only way to combat such dispersal is not to maintain the current organization of the field at all costs, but to critically reappraise the theory of narrative. As Raphaël Baroni (2016) rightly notes, there is today a terrible lack of “general theory” in the field of narratology. And one of the most effective ways of strengthening the theoretical dimension of the discipline would certainly be, as Françoise Lavocat (2016) encourages us to do in a major overview of fiction, to abandon an overly homogenous, that is to say overly simplistic (because too Western and too contemporary) conception of narrative. It is high time for narratology to address – but on condition that it does so on an equal footing with other examples – narratives from elsewhere, narratives from other eras, other cultures and, of course, other media (visual or hybrid, in particular) where the laws of narrative are sometimes very different from those we usually analyze.

- 14 To put it another way: no theoretical approach, either in narratology or elsewhere, can be developed and last if it has no practical material to analyze. *If the narrative is slack, the narratology will be slack.* If this is the case, it can be assumed that a general return to more conventional forms of narrative will necessarily have a powerful effect on narratology as a theoretical discipline, and consequently on the interest it inspires. In the absence of exciting questions requiring a search for new answers, there will soon be no need for this field of research at all. Now, the impoverishment of narrative in contemporary culture is undeniable in my opinion, *precisely because of* the inflated use of narrative: nothing sells without a little “storytelling”, in every sense of the word. Moreover, since any narrative must be able to migrate easily from one medium to another, it is indispensable for the stories in question to be as elementary as possible, or even that they remain devoid of any proper narrative element. The great champions of transmedia narrative willingly insist on the need to give precedence to character development and diegesis, to the detriment of the narrative itself, which is ultimately added like a cherry on the “storyworld” cake (Jenkins, 2006). Neither the instrumentalization of narratology, its transformation into a toolbox that exasperates all those who would prefer a more theoretical approach to the discipline, nor the shift from fundamental narratology to applied narratology, are merely passing epiphenomena, but the inevitable consequence of an emasculation of the objects offered for analysis. The trivialization of literature – since it seems to me that this is the original cause of the problem – as well as its definite exclusion from the social field – the loss of prestige by the writing profession, competition between reading and other forms of communication, whether for information or entertainment, the exclusion of literature from school curricula (including in higher education), the fading of cultural memory and withdrawal into the instant media (here-and-now), etc. – all these changes may be seen by some as a form of emancipation, i.e. as a rejection of an outdated elitist culture, but they also lead to a watering down of narrative objects, which has a strong impact on the discipline that is supposed to analyze such objects. Since we now accept that everything is narrative, that everyone tells stories, that our culture is narrative from one end to the other, regardless of the form of the narratives (which are expected to be able to hop cheerfully from one medium and one media to another), the need for in-depth analysis of the narrative can only weaken. In this sense, the future of the discipline depends not only on its own ability to rethink a number of priorities, but also, and above all, on what will or will not happen in the stories we produce. Let us not

despair too quickly of television, for example, which may well still hold some pleasant surprises for us (Mittell, 2015). In order to reinvent narratology, one must first reinvent narrative.

Narrative and its material envelope

- 15 However, the problems of narratology are not only due to the historical situation it finds itself in today – and this will be the second major observation I would like to make and comment on in these pages. The aesthetic and social degradation of its primary object, the novel, and, more generally, of its primary field, the literary text, and its subsequent drift towards increasingly lightweight but financially profitable uses of storytelling, are not the only reasons for the self-doubt that has afflicted the discipline. Some quite different questions arise when we ask ourselves about the place and status of narratology.
- 16 At first glance, narratologists face a dilemma, which some of them solve by opting for just one of its definitions. Either – a minority solution these days, courageously defended by Raphaël Baroni – narratology is thought of as a theoretical investigation into the very nature of narrative or, if one prefers, narratives. Or – currently the majority solution – it is transformed into a methodological toolkit with a thousand and one uses, but none of which concerns the narrative in the authentic sense of the term (instead of the narrative, it is the use of the narrative that is investigated here, or the often very technical discussion of this or that aspect of the toolbox). For some, narratology that fails to be “pure” cannot be considered narratology. For others, it can only be justified insofar as it is able to offer services beyond its own field.
- 17 However, there is even more to this discussion. And once again, it is not possible to understand this state of affairs without also examining the object of the discipline, which cannot be ignored in any discussion of the latter’s methods or theoretical foundations. Indeed, narrative is a device that always comes in two forms (or more). Firstly, it can be described as an *abstract* structure, irrespective of the material form in which it is produced. It is the form of narrative that is at the heart of the historical reflections of Greimasian semiotics in particular, and the relevance of this research cannot be denied. Personally, I cannot help feeling a certain bemused admiration for the theoretical *coup de force* that led Algirdas Julien Greimas and his school to sum up the whole dynamic of the narrative with the following formula, which I will express without its usual convolutions as *subject seeks object*. But, secondly, there is also an approach to narrative that could be called singular or *specific*. The narrative is then examined as a material, media-shaped structure, and the narratology of this form of narrative accepts that ways of telling are inseparable from the formal properties of the chosen medium. We do not tell stories in film the way we tell stories in comic books, even if films can be adapted into comic book form and vice versa – any work being theoretically adaptable to any other medium (Jeannelle, 2013). Two narratologies are therefore conceivable – moreover, all the narratologists of the 1960s distinguished them with great care – but fortunately they are by no means incompatible.
- 18 It is important here to go a little further and examine this theoretically clear-cut distinction between *general* narrative on the one hand and *singular* narratives on the other. Unlike the first, which can be studied without paying attention to its mediated structure, the second would lose much of their interest, if not their meaning, once they

were detached from their material form. This observation is shockingly simplistic, but it has far-reaching consequences. To say that singular narratives must be approached in a given material form means, among other things, that the narrative object is never a pure object. Put another way: the narratologist studying a singular narrative inevitably finds himself confronted with a complex object, an agglomeration of elements that are both narrative and non-narrative. The latter are of various kinds, sometimes linked to the materiality of the signs used (the typographical choices of a novel affect the reader's appreciation of the narrative, for example), and sometimes to the cultural practice on which much of its meaning depends (it is a mistake, for example, to try to analyze a fictional narrative without tackling the aesthetic expectation horizon of this object, however slight it may be: one reads a story differently depending on whether it is not so much "powerful or miserable" as "beautiful or ugly", to intentionally misquote Jean de La Fontaine's "*Les Animaux malades de la peste*").

- 19 What is analyzed in both narratologies, the general and the particular, is therefore not the same object. In one case, the object under study will be an abstract form. In the other, it will be a concrete and particular form. While it is legitimate to posit that theoretical narratology has as its object the narrative (in this case, the narrative "in general"), the same cannot be said of all narratologies that focus on media specificity (some would even say "on the style") whose object is quite simply not the narrative (in this case the "individual and singular" narrative), but a radically impure narrative, inextricably braided with a number of elements that have nothing to do with the narrative per se, or – if one prefers – the different ways in which the general principles of the narrative – of the *fabula* – are modelled according to a certain media base. In this specific narratology, which can also aspire to a certain generality, whether identified with a given media or transmedia, the narrative can never be isolated as an entity or as existing as a totally autonomous aspect of the work. The limits of narratology as a toolbox are therefore undeniable, ignoring as it does the anchoring of the narrative thread in a textual skein, any simplification of which is tantamount to destruction.

Conclusion

- 20 What can we conclude from these observations, which attempt to shed new light on the malaise in narratology by looking back at the early years of the discipline, its theory and creation combined? Three lessons are in order.
- 21 The most important is the imperative need for historicization. A discipline must always take into account the variable nature, in time but also in space, of its object and therefore think carefully about the questions it asks and how it prioritizes the issues at stake. Sensible modesty, no doubt – but also a simple precaution concerning method. In the social sciences and humanities, the same questions come up over and over again, but often for the wrong reasons. Narratology, and it is not alone in incurring this reproach, sometimes finds it difficult to consolidate its advances and may thus find itself advancing in fits and starts. Since we cannot agree on what has been achieved, we keep reopening the same fronts and refighting the same battles. This is why there is still no universally accepted definition of what narrative is, as it is so much easier – and professionally advantageous – to challenge whichever definition is currently most fashionable than to produce a thorough synthesis of what has been done and

commented on since (say) Plato and Aristotle. However, sometimes it can also be extremely useful to take up an abandoned issue. It is often the only way to make progress. To be precise, it seems to me that an informed return to the problems of narrative, stirred up by structuralist thinking, would seriously help to strengthen the theoretical foundation that narratology sorely needs.

- 22 A second lesson concerns the relationship between theory and practice, which is never an easy matter. Narratology cannot and should not be transformed into a simple toolbox to be used for any purpose regarding storytelling, in any context or media. As soon as we move from the general narrative to the ever more varied range of singular narratives – to take the two extremes here, for there are also intermediate degrees, such as the narrative modelled by the various genres – narratology changes in nature. On the one hand, its theoretical toolset is ordered as a function of the particularities of the analyzed object. To give just one example: how much misinterpretation was produced in the mechanical transfer of the concept of *showing* between literary and cinematic narrative, before the concept of “mega-narrator” (Gaudreault, 1988) clarified somewhat the sterile discussions of films that tell their own story, without the intervention of any narrative agent! On the other hand, the practice of storytelling itself is always revived and energized by theory. Everyone knows that taxonomies frequently reveal a few blanks that creators are called upon to fill, even if it means revealing the limitations of the initial classifications. There seems to me to be clear evidence of this healthy dissension in the risky business of the theories of autobiographical narrative (Lejeune, 1975) and of autofiction (Doubrovsky, 1977), which have challenged and transformed each other almost from their beginnings and which can both be seen as examples of the intermediate degrees between narrative in general and narrative in the context of a single media.
- 23 A third lesson, finally, would have us impel narratology towards a kind of methodological “regionalization”. As much as it seems necessary to seriously invest in fundamental research in narratology, we must also avoid any form of study concerning singular narratives that favors the narrative dimension to the detriment, or even exclusion, of the other levels and elements of the text. To unravel from the woof and warp of a tapestry nothing more than the narrative weave – provided of course that such a thing is actually feasible – quickly leads to the mutilation of the object. In the context of a particular work, the analysis of the narrative can certainly be a sufficiently valid goal. But the narrative itself, i.e. the elements labelled as narrative, must never be the sole object of the researcher's attention. Narratology, on the other hand, should always strive to establish links between narrative units and non-narrative aspects – but formulating the opposition in such a clearcut way already implies that there must be many forms that are less easily classifiable – so as to bring out both the complexity of the object and the contribution of the narrative to the composition of the whole.

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NOTES

1. One cannot but be struck by the analogies between the work of Edmund Wilson, which dates from 1931, and the contemporary work of someone like William Marx. But that would take us too far away from narratology.
2. It goes without saying that Algirdas Julien Greimas is by no means alone in contributing to the rich structuralist tradition. An in-depth discussion, not limited historically or geographically to the Paris of the sixties, could for example (I insist on the "for example") add Jean-Michel Adam's research on sequentiality (1992) or Françoise Revaz's research on the gradations of narrativity (2009).

ABSTRACTS

This article offers less an answer to the critical propositions by Raphaël Baroni in "*L'Empire de la narratologie, ses défis et ses faiblesses*" (The Empire of Narratology, its Challenges and Weaknesses) than an attempt to reframe the current debate on narratology in a different context. Firstly, the article suggests returning to the golden age of structuralism, which was also characterized by a ruthless rejection of all things narrative. Secondly, it suggests a new reading of the tension between general narratology and applied narratology, in order to plead for a "pure" theory of narratology as well as a redefinition of the forms of narratology as "toolkit" and the issues it has to deal with.

Cet article est moins une « réplique » aux propositions critiques de Raphaël Baroni dans « *L'Empire de la narratologie, ses défis et ses faiblesses* » qu'une tentative de situer les débats actuels sur la narratologie dans un autre contexte. D'abord, on s'efforce de revenir à l'âge d'or du structuralisme, qui fut aussi une époque marquée par un refus catégorique du récit. Dans un deuxième temps, on propose une nouvelle lecture de la tension entre narratologie générale et narratologie appliquée, qui débouche à la fois sur une défense de la théorie « pure » et sur une redéfinition des formes et des enjeux de la narratologie comme boîte à outils.

INDEX

Mots-clés: narratologie, poésie, pratique, récit, structuralisme, théorie

Keywords: narratology, poetry, practice, story, structuralism, theory

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